

## Reach Higher with Career and Technical Education

As Career and Technical Education (CTE) moves into more mainstream educational areas through programs such as pre-engineering, advanced manufacturing and medical technology, some feel that traditional skills classes such as electrical technology, welding, automotive technology and carpentry may get left behind.

Not true, said Associate Commissioner Dale Winkler, who heads up the Office of Career and Technical Education (OCTE) for the Kentucky Department of Education. He said those skills are just as needed, but often students, parents and even school counselors don't realize how vital those programs are as they relate to a trained workforce and furthering one's education.



"It's just a matter of educating students on the many fields they can enter through such programs and educating parents and teachers on just how important it is to keep these programs in tech schools across the state and throughout the country," Winkler said.

A new OCTE initiative called "Reach Higher with CTE" has been launched to help explain the need for teaching these classes as well as other CTE programs and to educate the public on how necessary skills like welding, electricity, auto repair and carpentry are to the well-being of the economy.

"These skills touch each one of us every day in some way," Winkler added. "It's hard to imagine not having students go through these programs so they can one day fulfill the ever-present need for these jobs."

The U.S. Department of Labor projects growth in most skilled technical areas through the year 2020. According to information listed by the agency's Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- Employment of carpenters is projected to grow 20 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. Job prospects for carpenters should improve over the decade as construction rebounds from the recent recession.
- Employment of electricians is projected to grow 23 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. Homes and businesses require more wiring than ever, and electricians will be needed to install the necessary components.
- Employment of welders, cutters, solderers, and brazers is expected to grow 15 percent from 2010 to 2020, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Skilled welders with up-to-date training should have the best job prospects.

- Employment of automotive service technicians and mechanics is expected to grow 17 percent from 2010 to 2020. Job opportunities for qualified jobseekers should be very good.

As with any initiative, OCTE is implementing an operational plan including working with business and industry partners to promote CTE – especially to those industry partners not normally associated with career education. Another part of the program is related to providing information about CTE programs to students, parents, educators and the general



Veterinarian Tech students at Locust Trace Agri-Science Farm get a lesson from teacher and veterinarian Jim Martin on how to examine small animals.

public through student-ambassadors, newsletters, press releases and existing social media avenues.

OCTE is the administrative home to all state CTE student organizations from which state and local chapter officers will serve as ambassadors speaking with local education and civic organizations to provide information about the “Reach Higher” initiative and other aspects of CTE.

“We can distribute information in a variety of ways, but it is our students who can speak best to the value of CTE,” said Joe Morgan, OCTE branch manager who oversees those organization advisors. “For many students, their CTE experience will provide the knowledge used to guide their career decisions.”

Morgan also said a more moderate and continuous path to success is the approach OCTE is taking as opposed to pushing the program ahead too quickly.

“In an era when budgets are tight and time is at a premium, we want to proceed in a timely but reasonable fashion,” he said. “This initiative is revenue neutral and is designed more to create a positive state of being for CTE rather than implement new or costly programs. We want ‘Reach Higher with CTE’ to be as much about a belief and a changed perspective more than anything.”

### **What business already thinks**

Across the country, countless industries already support CTE in some way –be it through apprenticeship training programs, on-the-job training initiatives or providing equipment to secondary programs. And more corporation heads are speaking out on the value of CTE.

Nicholas T. Pinchuk, chairman and chief executive officer of Snap-on Inc., said what's needed is an American workforce armed with the right skills – a workforce enabled by technical education.



Welding students from across the state competed in the Central Kentucky Welding Classic held recently in Harrodsburg.

“Industry and government both must participate in this effort. In that regard, I see two major areas of focus. Industry needs to enable technical institutions. We must ensure that schools are using the best equipment and facilities. Industry also needs to help set standards for education so that students learn the specific skills that are necessary, that are actionable in the marketplace and that can get them the jobs that create prosperity. That’s first,” he said. “Second, is that somewhere along the way, America – in my opinion – has lost a bit of its respect for technical occupations. They are now often viewed as a consolation for not earning a four-year degree. Both government and industry need to work in tandem to change this view. Young people must be encouraged to pursue technical professions.”

Jim Lentz, president and CEO of Toyota Motor Sales USA, said today’s cars are basically

computers on wheels, so having the education and technical experience is critical in the auto business or almost any field.

“Automobiles have nearly 1,000 times more computing power than the system that guided Apollo astronauts to the moon. It’s true,” he said. “Further, even more advanced technologies and electronics are being added to vehicles. And, since cars are becoming more complex, we’re going to need good people that have the knowledge and the know-how to keep things in tip-top condition.”

With more and more emphasis on improving college-and career-readiness goals, CTE is playing a much stronger role in the educational process than ever before, noted Winkler.

“But it will take a combination of our traditional and newer programs to make this movement sustainable,” he said. “We hope the ‘Reach Higher’ initiative is not only embraced in our system but throughout the state and even beyond as CTE educators continue to prepare the new generation workforce for lifelong careers.”